

## Christmas Eve in New France

In the little town of "New France," a few miles from Quebec, there lived an old man by the name of Perry Fanchion. He was about sixty years of age, a wealthy old bachelor, who, with the exception of a housekeeper, lived alone in a great weather-beaten old mansion on the river road. He lived a very secluded kind of life, was seldom seen upon the streets of the town, and attracted very little attention when he was seen. There were hardly ten people in the place that knew the man or anything concerning his life.

Yet there had been a time in the life of Perry Fanchion when he had attracted a great deal of attention, and won the sympathy and pity of the whole town. That had been over forty years ago, and in the meantime the town had changed from a village into a city. The old families had died out and the younger generation had forgotten the history of Perry Fanchion.

It was Christmas eve night and bitterly cold. Sleet and snow drove with incessant fury against the great French windows. The heavy old oak doors rattled and shook, while the wind shrilled mournfully among the many old-fashioned gables and chimneys.

Perry sat gazing into the fire. His hair was snow-white, his eyes were dark, and tonight they had a tragic, gloomy look.

On the old colonial furniture the sinister faces carved there grinned horribly and the iron claws seemed to



"Well, Well—I Hope the Children Are All in Bed."

grip the floor hard, as though they were expressing some dark emotion or evil thought.

Forty years ago this night Perry was a happy man, for tomorrow he was to marry the beautiful Miss Nelly Leroy, daughter of the rector of St. Agnes.

But that great factor in the events of a man's career, fate, willed otherwise, for only a few days before the wedding was to take place the bride-to-be was stricken with a fatal illness and less than a week later was laid away in the village graveyard.

After the funeral Perry Fanchion shut himself up, almost alone, in the great house. Time moved on and people forgot! One by one his friends left him, until at last he stood alone, a stranger in a stranger world!

About this time the poorer people, the destitute of the city, became aware of the fact that they had a friend, a very good, mysterious friend, mysterious because, try as they might (and did) they never could discover his identity.

One time when a severe landlord was about to turn a poor family out of the home they lived in, because they were not able to pay the rent, that family found the required amount and a short note asking them to accept the money as a gift, by the fireplace. Several times incidents like this occurred among the unfortunate, but as to where these mysterious presents came from, or by whom presented, none could ever tell. But the children suspected Santa Claus of having a hand in the matter.

Tonight as Perry sat by the fire he was very sad and very, very lonesome. The town clock struck ten. Perry arose, donned a huge fur coat to play his little act bravely. A worn, tired smile played around his usually grim mouth as he thought of the scenes of joy and poverty he would witness this night. He crossed the town with

rapid, nervous strides and entered a little family burying ground. He was gone for thirty minutes and when he returned his face showed traces of deep emotion.

"Good-night, sweetheart, I have waited forty years; surely the end cannot be far distant!" he murmured as he softly closed the gate.

There came a jingling of sleigh bells—a sleigh drove up, he entered and was whirled away over the snow.

In a tiny little hovel on the edge of the city five little curly-headed children, dressed in old and ragged but clean clothes were grouped around a small fire trying to keep warm. Their mother was sewing for a living, her husband having died several years ago, leaving the children to her to provide for, and being a woman of good education, she was trying to rear her children as best she might. She was having a desperate struggle and day by day she saw with despair the fight growing harder and harder.

"Mother, when is Santa Claus coming?" inquired little Billy.

For a while mother didn't seem to want to say anything. A large tear fell silently on her work. With a hasty movement, almost angrily, she brushed it aside.

"Perhaps he won't come at all!" she replied with a little catch in her voice.

"N-o-o-o-o!" came a chorus of unbelieving voices from the fire.

"He is coming!"

Suddenly there came a jingling of bells and a sleigh drew up in front of the home.

"Whoop!" yelled Johnny. "Come on kids—Santa Claus! My eye!"

In an instant the fire was deserted and five little heads were peering eagerly out of the door.

"Gee willikins! Look at the toys!"

"Well, well," said Santy in a loud voice, pretending not to see the little ones. "I hope the children are all in bed tonight, for if they are not, I will not come again."

Five curly heads vanished in a second, and when the old gentleman entered the room all were tucked snugly in bed—that is all but Billy, who in his excitement and hurry pulled all the cover up over his head and left his feet and body uncovered.

Santa Claus laughed and dumped the contents of his pack near the hearth. There were drums, dolls, tin soldiers, books, candy, nuts and fireworks.

Just at this moment Billy's toe rubbed up a splinter, and there came a subdued grunt from the bed which changed to a stifled, sleepy kind of cough as the "old fellow" turned around. The snores redoubled in volume.

Old Santy handed mother a sealed envelope and departed before she could sufficiently recover from her confusion and surprise to thank him. It was addressed to her, so she broke the seal. The sum and substance of it was, that the house and property of Fanchion and something like five hundred dollars were to be hers upon the death of Perry Fanchion.

So at last the identity of the mysterious Santa Claus and the friend of the poor and unfortunate was disclosed.

Her home was only one of the many to which he had been that night. Tomorrow they would honor him. They would come one and all to thank him, to praise him, to bless him—perhaps to beg for more as the case might be.

The sleigh stopped at the Fanchion homestead and old Santa Claus paid the driver and entered the house.

Perry was weary and as he walked down the dark, gloomy hall he almost dropped with fatigue. Fatigue of the body, weariness of the soul, the soreness of a broken heart, all conspired against him! Wearily he slid out of the disguise. His eyes wandered with a pitiful expression over the empty, dark room. None came to welcome him. No one to love or care for him. She had gone on before. Perhaps she was waiting for him up there now. He didn't know. The blood-chilling faces grinned and the cruel claws gripped.

He drew one of the heavy old chairs up before the dying embers and cast down, bowing his head far over into the grate. Closer he huddled. What was this dreadful chill that seemed to be taking possession of his body? His great sorrow preyed upon him.

"Oh, God!" he murmured; "I can stand it no longer."

Something gentle and soft stroked his hair! His hair that was white as snow. Two arms encircled him lovingly.

He looked up, at first unbelievingly, and then a wonderful smile lit up his face.

"Nelly!" he exclaimed, joyously. "At last you have come for me. I knew you would! I thank Thee O—"

His voice trailed away in the distance.

The fire died out and the faces no longer grinned, but seemed to smile in the darkness. Far off, just as the dawn was breaking, the chiming rang out their message. Was it fancy or did a soul far out in space echo:

"Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will toward men."

Perry was at rest!



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## How Dolls Kept the Night Before Xmas

**C**HRISTMAS eve had come and the long, busy day was over at last.

The toys were not sorry, for they were quite tired out with the bustle and noise, though they had enjoyed the company of the crowds of children, who had been about all day. But you see even engines and trains, energetic though they are, like to stop a minute after they run down; jumping jacks want to catch their breath between jumps and dogs that bark and sheep that bleat and lions that roar enjoy little spaces of silence just like other folks.

But every one of them had done his best stunt over and over all day and now, in quiet and darkness, they could go to sleep—all but the dolls, who had been left standing bolt upright and who couldn't shut their eyes in consequence. So they stood up without a wink and used the night to think and think, when—

"Mamma, mamma," came from somewhere! Had some child been left in the toy shop by mistake and locked in? "Mamma, mamma, mamma." The sound was familiar, when the toys waked up enough to use their minds. They had heard that squeaking call all day.

"Dear me, child," exclaimed the big doll from Paris—the doll with the beautiful face and delicate nerves, who stands right behind the "mamma doll." "Stop that crying! Take off that placard!" (You've seen the sign on dolls, "I can say 'Mamma.'") Fanchion was cross indeed, but wasn't she beautiful! You see her in the picture at the left of Charlie Chaplin. She is in street dress with mole-colored corduroy coat and hat of the same material with pink velvet facing. She has real lace at her wrists and ermine furs.

"Maybe it is time for 'first aid' to hurt feelings," thought the boy scout who stood near, so he said, "Never mind that French lady; she doesn't know what it is to be afraid of the dark. You'll find 'mamma' in the morning," and the boy scout who was covered with "merit badges" turned back to his particular charge. You see, he had picked up an Indian papoose as he came through the wood, and there she hung in her funny bark cradle on his arm—little Owassa, the bluebird.

Meanwhile Emil and Katrina Krusen, who didn't understand English very well, kept to themselves and spoke in German. They were, many people thought, the prettiest dolls in the shop. (You should have seen the Parisian shrug her aristocratic shoulders, when she overheard that remark!) That was because the first member of the Krusen family was made by an artist who wanted her own little girl's doll to look like a real child. So she painted the face in what painters call "flesh tints," and saw to it that there was a pleasant expression on it. Katrina looks troubled in the picture, but that is because she is a little homesick for the kind of Christmas they have in Germany. She says, "Ach! Emil! I want to be in the little house where the Christmas tree stands in the window. It has all its candles lighted tonight and the shade is pulled back. I want to sing carols and go to church tomorrow morning, and have goose for dinner and play games—"

"When is a doll not a doll," broke in the Jester, over at the left, who never would let anybody be sad if he could help it. "When it's a doidrum!" "Or a dolphin," squeaked the Campbell Kid; "Or a dollar," put in Daddy Longlegs, who was standing in the background.

"Cheap wit," remarked the college girl dressed in rose and gray in honor of Vassar, who stood behind the clown. "When it's dollie podiae or doloimite. These," she explained grandly, "mean insects or stones, speaking in popular language, such as you can understand—"

"Hello, are you ready?" It was the voice of the photographer. "I've come for your pictures. Look pleasant now!"

And they did. And so did Santa Claus, who had been listening all the time in the background.—Chicago Daily News.

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